



## THE HARLOW CHORUS IN THE MESSIAH AT KING'S COLLEGE CHAPEL, CAMBRIDGE

Last evening in the Chapel of King's College we witnessed what was already a fine chorus respond to a great work, a sublime setting, and a talented new musical director to reach a thrilling new level of excellence.

This was a performance of sustained intensity, balance and power that was as moving as it was thrilling. Every detail of colour and rich harmony in the part-singing was drawn to fully realise the dynamics and the drama of the Oratorio; from the caressing warmth of the basses to the certain confidence in the power surges of the sopranos, this was very fine choral singing by any standards.

Messiah is a choral showpiece but it does need a fitting orchestral setting if it is to avoid becoming just a sequence of "show stoppers". Last night the Saraband Consort (augmented to a full baroque orchestra) provided a pitch perfect and elegant musical narrative to the unfolding drama. They were especially fine in accompanying the soloists, allowing each of them to reach that towering void with the amazing story they had come to tell.

We have come to expect the Harlow Chorus to select its soloists with an unerring feel for balance (visually and vocally) and for excellence. Ruth Jenkins (soprano), Lucy Goddard (alto), Christopher Bowen (tenor) and Edward Grint (bass) were each at ease with the power of what was happening behind them and were each equal to the particular demands of singing such well-known and well-loved music. Not surprisingly, those with the best songs caught the eye and the ear. Ruth Jenkins looked and sounded radiant in urging us to "rejoice greatly". Edward Grint is a considerable talent and given the blockbuster "Why do the nations so furiously rage together" (particular edge this week) did not fail to thrill.

From the conversation in the Chapel at the end of the evening among the regular Harlow Chorus supporters, I am not alone in thinking that under Alexander Chaplin we had witnessed a new level of musical sophistication and confidence. A Chorus that was already well worth travelling a long way to hear now promises even more for the future.

Thank you, Alexander Chaplin, for the self-evident talent and time you have given to produce such a memorable and wonderful early Christmas present.

Thank you Handel as always.

Finally, thank you, Cambridge, for such a magically seasonal setting to an evening that will stay long in the memory for all the right reasons.

David Batterbee - 20 December, 2009